

ANGEL DOWN

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| ABSTRACT..... | 1 |
| DEDICATION..... | 3 |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | 4 |
| 1. AESTHETIC MOTIVATION AND RESEARCH QUESTION..... | 5 |
| 2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT, DISCIPLINARY PARADIGMS, AND AESTHETIC STANDARDS..... | 9 |
| 3. EXPLANATION OF EXHIBIT | 13 |
| 4. REFLECTION | 16 |
| WORKS CITED | 19 |
| APPENDIX: CREATIVE ARTIFACT | 21 |
| Chapter 1..... | 21 |
| Chapter 2..... | 30 |
| Chapter 6..... | 38 |
| Chapter 7..... | 47 |
| Chapter 8..... | 51 |
| Poetry..... | 63 |

ABSTRACT

Angel Down

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My thesis is a novel which aims to tell the story on an angel who is banished from Heaven and goes on a journey to attempt to return. My novel seeks to portray a journey of spirituality and sexuality through the format of the classic Hero's Journey by Joseph Campbell. The use of the Hero's Journey specifically shows growth and change of self/previous biases. My research consisted of fantasy novels, plays, and media which all dealt with angelic narrative. Prior works tend to focus on the religious aspect of biblical tales and do not add much, if any LGBT representation. Novels such as the "His Dark Materials" trilogy by Phillip Pullman and Cassandra Clare's "The Mortal Instruments" series both contain angelic imagery and small cases of LGBT representation. However, both of these series put the representation on the back burner and it is not something that is integral to the plot of either of the stories but simply something added to give the story more diversity. The problem with doing this is by adding this "diversity" in this way, the full depth of LGBT experiences is not fully conceptualized. The other half of my research dealt with various poets and artists which would help build my style for the poetry

which appears in my novel. The inclusion of poetry in my novel is used to show the inner feelings of my character but also to introduce more poetry to a wider young adult audience.

DEDICATION

To my family who's supported me every step of the way, thank you ☺

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1. AESTHETIC MOTIVATION AND RESEARCH QUESTION

My research project is called *Angel Down*. It is a prose novel with verse that aims to tell the story of Sapphiel, an angel who has fallen out of grace with Heaven. In his journey to return to Heaven, he encounters different obstacles which expose his human side and makes him question what he really wants. This is formatted in the Hero's Journey by Joseph Campbell, a story which many fantasy adventure tales tend to follow. I took inspiration from many sources of media including literature, artwork, theatre, television, film, and videogames. Firstly, my novel includes poetry and vivid descriptions to go with the grand nature. Gustave Dore's Artwork from *Paradise Lost*, helped me visualize what I wanted Heaven to appear as and allowed me to describe minute details such as an angel's wings or the appearance of the sky. The film, *Wings of Desire*, had a noir approach to their description of angels in a city landscape. I was able to use that in terms of my novel because it takes place in Las Vegas. Finally, I took inspiration from the videogame series, *Bayonetta*, which has monstrous depictions of angels. They are unsettling yet still very angelic and ethereal, following classic depictions of porcelain sculpted angels.

As a queer person, I have grown up reading a variety of fantasy literature because the genre is unique and deals with magic. I connected with the genre because of its offbeat nature and felt that it replicated the "offbeatness" I had in myself. I grew up not knowing what my sexuality was and how to handle that because I did not have much material that showed LGBT relationships and characters in a light where I would want to learn more about them. The lack of resources I had made me feel alone and confused. This feeling of loneliness was only amplified by my experiences as a black person living in a dominated white neighborhood and school

system. I had also grown up in a very Christian household/church, where I was taught that being gay was a sin. Writing a story about queer angels is representative of my upbringing in church and how I have grown from it and come to terms with my spirituality in relation to my sexuality.

In many fantasy novels, LGBT representation is a surprisingly hard theme to find especially in a genre that explores the unknown and situations that do not fit into societal norms. My research question aims to call attention to the issues of misrepresentation while also packaging it in a grand mythic tale. How can LGBT characters be represented in a way that does justice to the community without patronizing them, allowing them to prosper without forcing an unrealistic narrative? My creative artifact answers this by telling an adventurous story while having LGBT characters leading it.

My creative project is important to the field of fantasy young adult literature because it is another means of representation for the LGBT community. There are too many novels where LGBT characters are pushed to the side in favor of a heteronormative storyline. In most cases, LGBT characters are simply nonexistent or slapped into the story to provide a means of false representation, or “representation for the sake of representation”. In general media, LGBT characters can also appear as sidekicks that simply serve as a tool for the heterosexual protagonist to “find themselves” or place the protagonist as an outcast because they are associated with a marginalized community. The gay character is often a caricature or stereotype that portrays false views of gay people to not only the LGBT community, but also consumers of the general public. These depictions of gay people is harmful and riddled with inaccuracies that portray them almost as cartoon characters rather than human beings with real life stories, struggles, and feelings.

My novel will put LGBT characters on the foreground without their queerness overshadowing them as a person. What I mean by this statement is that works that include gay characters make their storylines revolve solely on their gayness. However, my novel will include other motivations which would allow their queerness to show naturally and not forced. This is important because queer young adults and teenagers need to see themselves in media they are consuming, without seeing queerness in a constant negative connotation. LGBT people can feel very alone and misunderstood in a society where many gay people are still being oppressed for their sexuality. A novel will not fix the deeper political and societal issues gay people have to face, but it does give a source of comfort and understanding.

LGBT stories tend to be darker and aestheticize the theme of going through painful hardships. Most storylines revolve around the AIDS/HIV epidemic, societal/familial pressure, and/or religious oppression. For example, In the Netflix television series, 13 Reasons Why, gay characters are put through both physical and sexual assaults for no reason other than to bring added hardships to their characters. The characters themselves never grew in a healthy way from these experiences and I believe this is something incredibly toxic especially when teenagers are consuming this. My characters will go through numerous trials, but they are not solely based on their sexuality. My novel follows a new way of LGBT representation where their queer identity is not under constant scrutiny and the characters have to deal with an array of problems besides this.

In terms of the context of my story, Sapphiel is at odds with his archangels, but that struggle never comes from a result of his sexuality. He seeks to find the truth about what he really is and clear his name in order to get back into Heaven. His human love interest Elijah, however, has an internal struggle regarding his sexuality and his journey is to discover how to

cope with that. My novel has a healthy combination between delving deep into the struggles of sexuality, without making that the main conflict in the story. It is only being used to help the characters grow to better face off against the real threat they must overcome.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT, DISCIPLINARY PARADIGMS, AND AESTHETIC STANDARDS

Young Adult literature is a genre that tends to transcend through multiple forms of media because it can connect with a younger audience. YA literature is often taught in schools and colleges, because of its ability to engage readers in a generation where reading is not often considered a hobby. Series such as the *Hunger Games*, *Twilight*, and the *Divergent* novels have been adapted to films, becoming extremely successful franchises which shows the influence the genre has on current media. I focused specifically on fantasy young adult literature when choosing novels and came to research *The Mortal Instruments* and *His Dark Materials*. *The Mortal Instruments* was useful in that it showed me a fantasy young adult series with angels that functioned very differently to mine. Although the texts contained a fantastical world where descendant angels roam through Earth and protecting it from evil, it is told from a purely heterosexual view. I took influence from the classic depiction of young romance, much like the *Twilight* series, but my story is different in that it shows queer relationships. *His Dark Materials* by Phillip Pullman was used as a resource to show the theme of growth. It also contains a gay relationship between angels, which was a good source to see angel's relation with homosexuality. However, the characters are not at the foreground of the plot which is where my story diverges.

For the starting foundation of my research, I read classic mythic tales which had to do with angels or other mythic beings. *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, acted as a major pillar in my research because it told the story of an angel falling from Heaven in a poetic narrative. The way angels and demons confer with one another is an aspect that I admired because it allowed me to

visualize the constant tug of war between angels and demons in my story. Secondly, I researched *Prometheus Unbound*. The main thematic elements that I took from this play was in its main theme of freedom. Freedom is something that is very important to my character, something seen within them from very early. Breaking free from their oppressive higher powers is shared between my novel and this tale, but mine is told using Christian mythology.

The inclusion of poetry in my creative artifact was something I was passionate about because I wanted to bring it to a younger audience. Poetry is viewed as a “upper class” form of writing, which is not easily understood by the general public. This view is completely false and including poetry in a YA novel would allow people to be introduced to it without feeling overwhelmed. Poetry in my novel functions as a first-person point of view in contrast with the third-person prose. It is used to show the true feeling of the characters and feelings that the characters themselves do not fully understand.

I did extensive research on the works of William Blake and Sappho because their work contained elements that I was drawn to in terms of my own writing. William Blake was an incredibly accomplished poet, who was known for his surreal vividity and themes of religion. I have read his complete works, but the poems that I focused on for this project were “The Angel”, “The Marriage of Hell and Heaven”, “His Divine Image”, and “Proverbs of Hell” specifically. All these poems reference Christian theology and contain themes of abiding by God’s words, angel physiology, and the relationships between humans and God. His work was helpful in crafting the ideals of Heaven in poetic form and using verbiage of higher powers. The ancient Greek poet, Sappho, used beautiful imagery to convey her feelings towards other women and the Gods. She inspired me because her themes have to do with multiple facets of love including forbidden love, complete infatuation, and lost love. She is a pinnacle poet for both lesbian

literature and gay literature. I took note of all her poetry, but the ones that stood out in terms of my project were “Ode to Aphrodite” and “You in Sardis”, for their allusions to higher beings and themes of wishful longing.

Finally, regarding poetry, singer-songwriter Mariah Carey served as a modern resource. Specifically, her album *Daydream* contains amazingly vivid imagery with a dreamlike quality, which matched the way I wanted my poems to feel when being read aloud. Her song, *I am Free*, directly supported the theme of breaking free of bondage that is a major point of growth in Sapphiel’s journey.

There have been a few depictions of gay relationships regarding angels that I have researched. *Good Omens* by Neil Gaimon shows the relationship between an angel and demon through centuries of friendship together. Their relationship has clear queer undertones by the deep emotional bond they share, and their actions display a feeling of longing. While *Good Omens* is a fantastic fantasy series that blends in with the modern world, it suffers from the subdued nature in the relationship between Aziraphale and Crowley. The series is lead by queer-coded characters, but because their relationship is not explicitly shown in an intimate manner (meaning verbal/physical displays of romantic expression), it limits the queer narrative and makes the relationship feel underdeveloped. I have taken inspiration from this series/novel in terms of its world building, inclusion of Christian mythology in a modern setting, and the use of comedy. However, my work differs in the portrayal of gay relationships because mine shows the romantic development explicitly. My characters are not simply queer-coded but evidently gay.

The second source that I used was the play, *Angels in America*, a story about a gay man, Prior, who learns that he has AIDS. The disease completely changes the relationship he had with his lover and almost everyone abandons him. The series deals with the disease of AIDS, broken

relationships, and stigma against homosexuality. It also includes angels who give visions to mortals and reveals the relationship between angel and humans. I took inspiration from the angel's role in guiding humans through visions and prayers as a form of interaction between angels and humans in my own story. I also enjoyed the play's use of homosexuality to show how that changes previous relationships, especially in the cases of Prior, Louis, and Joe, whose relationships are tested by secrets, lies, and betrayals. While I found the theme of homosexuality causing some conflict in their relationships, my story differs in the importance of it to the main plot. As said in the Aesthetic Motivation section, many LGBT stories tend to revolve around the AIDS epidemic and destruction of relationships to due gayness. This constant inclusion of these themes severely limits how queer stories can be told and is something that I did not want to do.

Finally, I watched the popular television show *The Good Place* to conceptualize how Heaven works and its use of comedy. Comedy is something that is seen prevalently through YA literature and television shows because it connects easily to audiences. The humor in *The Good Place* is witty and stems from the weird ways in how Heaven works in that world. Even till its very end, the afterlife is shown as something unknown and mysterious. I did not want to set hard boundaries in the way death worked in my novel and *The Good Place* encapsulated that idea perfectly.

3. EXPLANATION OF EXHIBIT

Unfortunately, I was not able to attend an in-person presentation due to the safety concerns of the Covid-19 pandemic. I did attend the URS Symposium and used Microsoft PowerPoint to present my information. I specifically chose to use Microsoft PowerPoint because it is a program that I am very knowledgeable in and the design layouts that they have were something that looked very organized. The “venue” was a setup that I created on my desk. Even though this was occurring virtually, I wanted to create the most formal setting I could using the space around me. This means that I made sure to film in front of a solid color wall, wearing formal wear, and making sure that my hygiene and appearance was as if I were presenting in person.

Using Zoom, I was able to record myself giving a presentation along with my PowerPoint slides. I decided to use Zoom because it is something that I was already familiar with, in terms of going to class virtually and meetings that I had with various advisors. Zoom’s functions are highly compatible with other software and it was easier to learn all of the configurations. I used the apple video editing software, iMovie, to make sure that everything was in place before uploading it to YouTube. My audience were faculty that volunteered to give feedback to UGR scholars. In terms of the content, I decided to separate my presentation in six different sections in order to properly convey the amount of research that went into my creative artifact. I only had ten minutes to present my information, so a dilemma that I faced was figuring out how to include all of my information in an efficient and coherent manner. In order to plan out what I wanted to talk about, I wrote a page of notes for each section and cut out the excess information, leaving the core themes.

Memorization was very important to me because I did not want to seem like I was reading a script. Reading off something comes off as disingenuous and I felt like I needed to connect with my virtual audience, especially when talking about important topics such as LGBT representation. I tried to be genuine and have a happy demeanor when speaking because the audience responds more to liveliness than a monotonous presentation where passion is lacking.

I introduced my presentation with my abstract to give a general overview of what my creative artifact is about and several themes that it portrays. The second slide explained that aestheticism in my work and the various inspirations/influences that I used to construct my world and characters. All the images that were used had been properly cited and given rights to their respective owners. The next slide describes the inclusion of poetry in my creative thesis. I explained how various influences like William Blake and Sappho, influenced my own poetry and what aspects I researched of each poet. I also talked about why I decided to include poetry in my creative artifact because it is not necessarily something that is apparent in young adult literature. Next, I talked about the format of my novel, which was based on the Hero's Journey by Joseph Campbell. The next slide I included was on the classic myths and novels that I used as a foundation for my narrative and general depiction of angel physiology. This was very important to include because it served as a large part in my research. Finally, the last slide that I included that dealt with the research aspect of my novel was on LGBT/POC representation. I talked about why it was important to include based on previous inclusions of representation in the genre and generally in terms of all forms of media.

At the end of my presentation, I included an excerpt of prose from my novel, *Angel Down*, and also a poem. It was important for me to show what I had created and the results stemming from months of research. I read aloud both sections of my work and took note from

previous book readings that I had watched before. During the school year, I attended multiple book/poetry readings from various authors that came to Texas A&M University. This helped me to decide how much of my work I should show and how to properly read out my work, so the emotions would convey clearly.

The filming process took up a lot of time because I was trying to give out as much information about my artifact as I could in a ten minute slot. This proved to be a difficult challenge because I had to speak in a way that did not seem rushed and instead felt efficient. This ended up taking multiple takes. In addition to trying to control my speaking pace, I had problems with using filler words. I had to reshoot many times to limit the number of times I filled space with them, even though I still ended up saying them in my final presentation draft. I filmed my presentation with my laptop and did not use any other physical materials.

4. REFLECTION

When researching, I am so grateful for the sheer number of resources that were available to me. From my own advisor, LAUNCH representatives, Texas A&M databases, the Writing Center, and other resources; I was able to gain a lot of knowledge in how to research and gain useful materials for my creative artifact. When I begun the process of research, I encouraged myself to look for multiple medium and not limit myself to literature. I explored a plethora of resources including literature, film, television, theatre, artwork, and videogames. This allowed me to obtain information that was visual in order to provide better imagery. When I compiled all of the resources, I wrote notes off to the side of things I found to be important to my story or moments that I didn't like in order to contrast my novel with previous works. By constantly analyzing material while I consume the medium, I was able to easily organize my thoughts.

When gathering this research, I looked for material that would fit into one of the four sections I created for myself. These groups are described as classic, modern, poetry, and visuals. Classic resources are time specific and included works that could be seen as a pinnacle of literature. These included *Paradise Lost*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *The Divine Comedy of Dante Aleghri*. Modern describes works that were created in the 21st century and show the current state of depictions of angel and young adult literature. These includes media like *The Good Place*, *Mortal Instruments*, and *Good Omens*. Thirdly, Poetry includes works that would help me with content and technical skills regarding my own writing. As seen with my research on William Blake and Sappho. Lastly, the visual category is compiled works that helped me with the vivid descriptions in both my prose and poetry. These include media like *Bayonetta*, *Wings of Desire*, and *Gustave Dore's artwork of Paradise Lost*.

Originally, my artifact was going to be strictly poetry based, but I was worried that I was not going to be able to communicate my message. I decided on a combination of because I could gain benefits from both sides of writing. My creative artifact displays academic substance and produces knowledge because of the portrayal of Christian mythology, LGBT representation, and poetic elements. My novel contains real references to angels in the bible and displays a specific knowledge in the hierarchy of angels. My novel also teaches a more realistic depiction of gay characters without being saturated in stereotypes like less accurate portrayals of gay people. The inclusion of poetry provides a substantial amount of information because, as I said before, poetry is not something that is associated with the general public. Poetry introduces an entirely new way of conveying emotions and in depth analysis of how words are constructed in sentences.

My public presentation was interesting because I felt like I could have had more feedback. Of course, because we are living in a very closed off world right now, I understand that I was not able to have as in depth of a review as I would want. The comments on my presentation skills were useful because it commented on my tendency to use filler words. This is something that I have always struggled with, so having it specifically pointed out was useful because it is something I can carry on to in my future presentations. In terms of the content, I wish there were more feedback specifically on what they thought about the narrative and research that went into it. I did not change anything about my creative artifact after the feedback because of the lack of feedback of my content, but the presentation did rework the way I was going to talk about my skills in the way that I communicate information.

Before the presentation, I felt very nervous about my work. I am generally a private person and before this thesis my work had remained unseen to even close friends and family. Sharing something that has been so important to me over this past year since summer of 2020,

was hard for me to do and brought up a lot of anxiety. Especially when my work is based on my own personal experiences as a queer person, something that I still have not shared with some of my family. Though I did not receive feedback on specifics about my creative artifact, I was happy that people saw the amount of work that I put into it and commended me on the effectiveness of communicating my purpose of my novel. The presentation helped reaffirm that I was doing a good job and that this is something that has merit.

If I were to create my artifact again, which I do plan on continuing to create and perfect it, I would focus on the world building more. I want to make my world look completely different than any other depiction of Heaven that was shown in various medium. This is obviously a very tall task to fill, but I believe if I do more research and look specifically into the art of worldbuilding, I will be able to accomplish that. Secondly, I want to explore more elements of magic aside from angels because the inclusion of different magical entities could help distinguish my text even more from past works.

Overall, I feel very proud of what I have been able to come up with and have worked very hard in all aspects that it required. My creative artifact seeks to present a means of representation that is not only deeply meaningful but enjoyable as well. The balance between comedy and portraying difficult themes is something that was always in the forefront of my minds, because so many LGBT stories capitalize on their grief and makes that aspect the sole facet of their personality. Finally, being able to show this story of growth through the means of a grand mythic tale allows me to contrast religion and homosexuality, two themes which are often shown in opposition to each other.

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APPENDIX: CREATIVE ARTIFACT

Little Bird in Heaven

In this celestial realm nests a bird,

Bound by God's words,

It gapes at the luminous sky,

under his omniscient eyes,

Singing its own melody.

What is your destiny?

Chapter 1

Sapphiel loved to fly. He loved the feeling of being above everyone else. Feeling like he was in a different world. No obligations or rules to abide by. Spending most of his time soaring around the higher opaque clouds, seeing how fast he could go. His wings were grand, a rarity in common angels. They curved perfectly along his tall, slender frame, reaching the top of his head to the crevice of his knees. His long white feathers contrasted beautifully with his dark complexion. He looked like the perfect angel.

He hovered gently in the air, slowly flapping his wings, just barely keeping himself afloat. They progressively got faster and with one powerful gust downward, he propelled himself even higher through the celestial orangey pink sky and flew millions of feet into the air. Reaching the highest point in Heaven, he looked down at the blue world below him. Earth's spherical shape slightly poked out from beneath Heaven. The mortal realm was so small and demure compared to Heaven. He had never been down to the planet, but he knew he'd never want to. Humans were just so...stupid. Their minds were just so simple and malleable, easily corrupted by Lucifer's influence. They did things purely out of emotion and cause malice between themselves because of it. It was hard to feel bad for a species so idiotic.

Sapphiel focused his attention back onto Heaven. Its warm glow emanated an array of colors such as pink, orange, and yellow. The white flower covered clouds that speckled throughout the heavenly space, reflected the shimmering lights. In contrast was the dark vastness of space above him. He tried to bring himself to focus on the glittering stars, but Heaven's light shone brighter, and its radiating warmth yearned him to come back down. Sapphiel reluctantly sighed before taking a deep breath, tucking his wings to his body, and diving back down to Heaven like a falling meteor. He loved the slight burning sensation that surrounded him as he

dove. Excitement filling his body, he was an indestructible force of nature. Like a hot knife cutting through butter, he carved into the floral clouds, causing them to explode in a large puff of petals and mist. The water particles instantly evaporated on his steaming skin. With his eyes closed due to the blunt force of the wind against his face, Sapphiel imagined he was getting closer to the white marble floors of Heaven's surface. 1...2...3. He released his large wings from his body and parachuted upwards. Gracefully, Sapphiel glided towards a large cumulus cloud. Using his angelic weightlessness, he stepped onto the vapor and breathed out. Exhausted but satisfied, he slumped onto the cloud and draped his legs over the edge. Plucking a white petal from the cloud and fiddling it between his long fingers. The floral sweet scent shrouded his mind and the churning excitement that rushed through his body dissipated.

Perched atop this cloud, the angel civilization was in full view. Small figures of various angels performing daily duties atop the lower clouds where everything was built upon. Buildings were formed from the heavenly clouds, coming in different light shades of blue and pink. Angels flew in between the windows of the buildings, some preparing food, some singing hymns of the lord, and some guiding the newer angels around the community. It was a perfect utopia. He took another deep breath and outstretched his wings to let Heaven's light soak into him. His feathers shivered in pleasure as the warmth felt so good to him.

“Sapphiel!”

The good mood shattered all at once. He rolled his eyes without needing to look back at all. He could hear Luciel's shrill, nagging voice from miles away. The frail boy flew in front of him and hovered, looking down at him with his arms crossed and an accusatory stare on his face. His wings twitched in agitation and his feathers splayed out in a way where Sapphiel could see the feather meet his skin. His short bleach blonde hair always seemed to stay in place even up in

the breezy sky. His skin was pale, so much so it would reflect the omnipresent light making him prominently shine brighter than most angels. His youthful face was full of false disdain, hiding worry underneath. Saphael had known Luciel for all his life. Guiding him through Heaven and being a blonde thorn in Saphael's side for thousands of years. As much as Luciel annoyed him, he truly was the only person he could be himself with. Even though Luciel was a Dominion, a higher-ranking class in charge of directing the common angels, he didn't have to constantly make sure he was being perfect. He could speak his mind without worrying about being reported to the archangels.

"Where were you?" Luciel asked annoyed yet worried. His wings continued to twitch rapidly.

"What do you mean...?" Saphael feigned ignorance hoping it would maybe work for the first time in ten thousand years. Luciel huffed a breath out of his nose and began tapping his fingers against the top of his crossed arm, a sure tell sign he was about to go off.

"You missed scripture recitals, again."

"Oh, I was just rearranging the clouds. I'm sorry it took up a lot of time!" Luciel looked up to see clouds torn across the sky as Saphael had just destroyed them with his flying feats. He looked at Saphael then up at the cloud mess and then back again at Saphael. He was clearly unamused.

"This isn't funny, Saphael."

"I know but-" Luciel glared at Saphael daring him to say another word. He hovered back and forth with his hand on his chin. His wings flittered like a thousand thoughts were racing in his head at the same time.

“How are you supposed to properly teach the word of God if you don’t even know it?!”

Luciel put a hand over his heart and gasped as if he was in actual pain. He’s always been one for dramatics.

“Luciel, I already know everything. What’s the point of reciting those same old verses every day?” Luciel stopped pacing and turned his head slowly at Sapphiel. He flew a foot closer and put his hand on his shoulder, looking into his eyes with much concern.

“Sapphiel...We should always repeat the lord’s sayings. It is our duty as angels to spread his word and protect humans from Lucifer’s malevolence. We are in a war, don’t you want to do your part to help?” Sapphiel’s wings sunk a little and pulled closer into his body, no longer soaking in the light.

“Yes...I’m sorry. ”

Luciel rubbed his temples and sighed finally releasing his anger.

“Fine, but I swear Sapphiel, I shall drag you by the wings if you miss another lesson.”

“I know...I promise to go next time.”

Luciel grabbed him by the shoulders and led him down to the surface. As Sapphiel’s feet touched the ground, he felt as if he had come back into the real world. The aura of Heaven different. Sapphiel noticed the angels bustling and moving faster than usual. He looked over and saw an angel topple over another, almost dropping a vase of flowers in the process. The chaotic energy was extremely unusual.

“What is all going on?” He asked Luciel.

“They are preparing for the feast.”

Sapphiel followed Luciel on foot through the town. Their height difference was comical and to any human, you would think that Luciel was the younger of the two. Even though Lucas was little, he walked fast and Sapphiel had to make sure he wasn't faltering too far behind him.

"Yes I know, but everyone seems more panicked than usual." Luciel finally stopped walking and ruffled his feathers slightly as if he was about to tell Sapphiel some dreadful news.

"Rumor has it...Michael will be joining us today." Sapphiel gulped and felt a rush of anxiety come over him. His wings immediately tensed up and his feathers sprouted upwards, slightly shivering at the thought of the man. Michael, the head archangel, God's most trusted confidant, and general of the winged forces would be appearing at the feast.

"B-But he never comes?!"

"Well he is today.."

Sapphiel always felt indifferent to Michael. Unlike most angels, Michael did not exude a particularly friendly aura. He was colder, quieter, and gave Sapphiel an overall uneasy feeling whenever he was in his presence. Most of the time, Michael was too busy dealing with Lucifer's forces to even come to the feast.

"I bet Gabriel's happy." Sapphiel said and Luciel rolled his eyes. Luciel reported directly to Gabriel, the archangel in charge of beauty, decorations, architecture. Basically, nothing important. He was the complete opposite of Michael. Eccentric, vain, honestly a bit silly. He pressured Michael to attend the feast a multitude of times so Sapphiel guessed he finally cracked him this once.

"Don't even get me started. He gave all the Dominions these impossible tasks to fill." Luciel snapped and a scroll magically appeared in his hand. He unfurled the scroll, revealing a long list of items.

“Tell me how I am supposed to get 1 million doves to “fly in a star formation” out of the hall. It’s ridiculous Sapphiel.” Sapphiel liked when Luciel would complain about the “all so powerful” archangels. It felt nice to know he wasn’t completely sucked in.

Sapphiel fiddled with his tunic and followed Lucas through the town square, greeting angels and making sure everything was in order for the feast. It was funny to see them attempt to get themselves in order when Luciel came around to see them. His reputation preceded him as he was the perfectionist of all the Dominions. They stopped at a pink cloud building, the smell of fresh baked bread and sweet fruit pastries wafted through the open windows. They entered the bakery and greeted Elio, an angel in charge of making sure the assortment of desserts and pastries were ready for the archangels’ arrival. They all bowed to one another and Luciel began to speak.

“Blessed day, Elio. How are the preparations are coming along for the grand most honorable feast?” Sapphiel snickered a little at Luciel’s ability to switch into perfect saint mode. The stout man smoothed out his apron to make himself look more presentable but the various stains of batter and icing on his clothing made the action seem trivial.

“Oh yes, the preparations are coming along great.” Sapphiel peered back into the kitchen and saw tons of angels nervously spilling bowls and hopelessly trying to get the disarray in order. The cherubs, small angelic creatures, were cleaning up the mess on the kitchen floor. The small puff balls, flew across the floor, sweeping up the debris as they went. They should be happy Luciel was too short to see. Elio stood nervously as Luciel thoroughly inspected the food presented at the front. He knew that if one thing were out of place Luciel would make sure to let it be known. It was hilarious to see angels afraid of a scraggly, little boy but appearances are merely a projection and had no semblance to how experienced an angel was.

“The ambrosia’s looking exquisite.” Luciel gestured to the hundreds of plates of godly food. The golden pastry shined delicately against the light. It is said that ambrosia is what allows angels to connect to God even more. Some say that God talks to them after eating said food but Sapphiel thought that most angels who say that are just looking for attention. After all, only an archangel can directly communicate with the almighty lord. Luciel went on to inspect the rest of the lesser kinds of desserts and left Sapphiel and Elio to themselves.

“Everything looks amazing” Sapphiel said trying to make conversation.

“Yes, I hope Michael finds everything to be suitable.”

“If he doesn’t like this than Michael’s a fool” Elio shifted his feet uncomfortably. Sapphiel’s wings tensed as he realized what he had just said.

“Only kidding!” Sapphiel said raising his hands up defensively and laughing nervously through his teeth.

“Yes, of course.” Elio chuckled slightly but avoided eye contact with Sapphiel. His interactions with every angel aside from Lucas usually went like this. He really couldn’t be open with anyone else without them thinking he was a misguided angel.

Luciel came back to them, checking off his long list and giving his approval to Elio’s work.

Suddenly, horns blasted, and the sounds of bells echoed through the area. The archangels were arriving. Hurriedly, Luciel ordered the angels around him to start moving the last preparations into the main hall, a building made of clouds but much bigger. Gold adorned multiple pillars of cloud. Thousands of angels swarmed into the building like a large flock of birds. Sapphiel looked up and saw the grand carriage of Michael being towed by majestic Pegasi, their strong wings creating gusts of wind against the ground. The carriage, encrusted with

various gems and more gold, carried the most celestial being aside from God. Sapphiel gulped and Luciel took his hand, leading him into the hall.

Chapter 2

Saphael's anxiety turned into impatience as he waited for the archangels to enter the banquet hall. It had felt like hours had passed since he saw their grand chariots arrive through the pearly gates. The room was decorated to an even higher standard than usual, the cloud walls adorned with golden ribbons encrusted with an array of gems, mortals would kill themselves over. Diamonds, rubies, emeralds, opals, and others created a glimmer of majestic colors as the ever-present light shone through them. The glass dome ceiling displayed a mosaic of the Great War, a beautiful piece of art. The Powers, armored angels, wielding spears, bows, and swords gallantly fighting off Lucifer's forces. Beautiful yet graphic, the angels fought their demonic counterparts in a bloody massacre. The batlike demons tore through the flesh of some angels, in retaliation the angels inflicting deadly wounds with their weapons. At the center of the dome was Michael holding his signature flaming sword, hovering above the battlefield, and overseeing his armed forces. His sword was raised above his head and the icily defiant expression on his face carried the same intimidation on a glass mosaic as it did in real life.

Saphael shuffled his feet awkwardly as he sat with the other commonr angels. Fiddling with his slender fingers, his eyes darted back and forth throughout the room where sometimes he'd catch a glance from the other angels, who quickly looked away with blushed faces. Saphael took a moment to look at himself through a crystal chalice placed in front of him. His dark hair was jutted out in all directions like stalagmites on a cavern floor. Robes disheveled and frayed, burnt at the edges from his aerial escapade prior. But he knew they were not just staring at him because of his appearance. He always seemed to garner stares even in his most respectable state. Maybe they just didn't appreciate the broken clouds they'd have to fix or maybe it was because of that time he had accidentally released the pegasi from the stables during the orchestral

recital... It could have been a lot of things, but he didn't care, it wasn't like any of them took the time to actually speak to him. Saphael searched across the sea of white feathers for Luciel, whom he had been separated from due to their differing classes. Like a tiered cake, the dining tables were formed like rings in which the higher-ranking angels sat higher up. He peered intently at the second to top ring where all the Dominions were located. It was too far up for him to be able to see his friend's face, but he could make out a glittering bleach blonde speck in the distance. Even in an ocean of white, Luciel still stood apart from the other angels.

A loud shutter shook the room and seven beams of yellow light shone on top of the highest tier; they were finally arriving.

One by one each archangel began to beam into their respective places at the very top of the ring. The seven shining beams of light dissipated and revealed the deities. Giants, their tall and large frames casted a shadow among the lower rings. Dressed in the most regal and ornate robes, their figures were covered in gold and glitter. With one look it made sense to assume they could speak directly to God. They were ethereal and unobtainable, even to an immortal angel. A tall and slender form moved closer to the front in view of the other angels. Many pushed and pulled at others to get a glimpse of who it was but sunk back into their chairs when they learned it was Gabriel.

Gabriel peered over the edge, arms open, expecting a cheerful welcome. Reluctantly, everyone shouted but Saphael could feel the mood of the crowd shift. He looked towards the table of the Dominions, hoping he could see Luciel's reaction to Heaven's favorite angel. Gabriel's three pairs of wings perked upwards casting a larger shadow onto the lower tiers.

The towering angel fiddled with his robes, searching for something in his clothes. Like any other angel, he was extremely beautiful but that was exemplified to new heights because he

was an archangel. He emanated a radiant warmth which Sapphiel could feel on his fingertips. Gabriel always had a smug face, seemingly smiling at all times. His long silver locks rolled off his robe like velvet and his features were soft and inviting. On outside appearances, he seemed like a completely put together being but everyone in that room knew that wasn't the case at all. This man was constantly confused. In rushed huffs, he shook his robes violently until a large scroll fell on the floor with a huge clunk. He stared at the scroll and gestured to someone apart of the Dominions to help him retrieve the fallen parchment. Almost cinematically, Luciel flew up and grabbed the scroll which was almost the same size as his body. He struggled to propel himself upward carrying such a heavy object but succeeded in throwing over the scroll to Gabriel with a surprising amount of force behind it that made Gabriel glare at him a little.

“Thank you.”

Luciel smiled back but a quiet rage hid behind the façade.

“My dear angels...” He opened the large scroll which he let dramatically fall over the edge almost hitting someone on the middle tiers.

Sapphiel held his mouth with his hand as to not reveal his laughter. Gabriel's blissful obliviousness to how he was perceived always made him happy. Unlike his peers, he never found Gabriel to be completely unbearable. In fact, he would go on to say Gabriel was his favorite out of all the archangels. He had always found him to be comical in his quirks and loved the unintended chaos he would cause by just being himself. Maybe he would be more annoyed if he directly took orders from him, but it was nice to see some personality from the all-powerful council.

“I want to thank all of you for your absolutely sublime work on feast preparations today...although you didn’t complete everything I asked for perfectly...” Gabriel looked at the Dominions.

“...I’m sure we can still have an acceptable feast” Gabriel clapped giddily and waited for another applause which was still given but with less enthusiasm than last time, if that was possible.

“Today we are joined by a very special presence, I haven’t much to say but to introduce the general of our armed forces, protector of Earth, guardian of heaven, God’s most private confidant, Lucifer’s bane-“ A strong hand grasped Gabriel’s shoulder and his face reddened in embarrassment.

“Ahem, Michael” Gabriel slowly shuffled his way behind the large silhouette towards the back, dragging his long scroll across the floor.

Michael was at the center of it all. He moved closer to the front ahead of his fellow archangels, his figure different from other angels who were all tall but had a slender elegance to their appearance. Michael would not be described as elegant, he was grand, but lacked any sort of softness. His body towering any who stood next to him. Shoulders broad and wide taking up much of the space around him. Even his face, lacked any sort of curves or fat. It was angular and protruding which only exemplified this cold aura only Sapphiel could seemingly sense. Michael pulled his long arm from under his robe and reached out to the lower angels. His long fingers decorated with a plethora of gorgeous rings. His four pairs of wings unfurled from behind his back and stretched out onto either side of him. Their long feathers pricked out like glass shards, reflecting the multicolored lights onto the angels. With this one act, the silence of awe was replaced with screams. The crowd roared in cheers and praises, energetically raising their hands

high as if trying to reach the most delectable fruit atop the highest tree. Some had tears running down their faces, some vigorously chanted war phrases, and others singing hymns. The drama was insufferable. Michael clenched his hand into a fist and brought it close to his body, everyone became silent again anticipating what he would do next.

“God’s children...” His voice was deep and slightly sensual. As he talked a rumble of warmth grew in Sapphiel. To his chagrin, he became more captivated and enraptured in what the Guardian of Heaven was about to say. He hated the power he had over him, like he was losing part of his will.

“I am sorry that I haven’t visited in some time, but Lucifer’s influence grows stronger and stronger every day.”

The crowd shouted forgiveness to their prince’s absence. The brown-haired angel sitting next to Sapphiel raised his hand in the sky as tears ran down his face. Sapphiel shook his head at the amount of ridiculousness surrounding him. Hopefully, no one saw. Michael continued his drawn-out introduction.

“He continues to infect and defile the human souls, sins are running more rampant through Earth and our forces need more support in order to defeat the demons of Hell.” He gestured up towards the glass dome mural. The picture of war came to life and the violence became motion. The bloody images caused an uncomfortable stir amongst the angels.

“Greed, lust, pride, rage, indolence, gluttony, envy... humans partake in these like candy and their fragile minds become corrupt from the mere thought of these sins. But there is still hope for them. The more teachings we can spread, the less people are afflicted by his influence and we may be able to finally capture him.” With raised fists the angels began to chant

Michael's name in thunderous intensity. He smiled and sat down at the head of the archangels dining table, raising his chalice. Gabriel took a chalice and tapped the side of it with a fork.

"Thank you, Saint Michael, for your incredible words. Now let us feast and enjoy all that God has provided for us. To our heavenly general!" Everyone raised their chalices and praised Michael in succession to Gabriel.

Sapphiel didn't understand how someone could be so loved. Granted, he didn't save heaven from an eternal war but at least he was present. He slunk back into his chair, feeling more and more like a social pariah by the minute.

A symphony of horns and strings began to play a magical blend of music, setting the jovial mood. Cherubs, small angelic creatures, brought in a wide variety of Heaven's most delicious dishes. Plates of meat, ambrosia, desserts, and any other meal you could think of were brought out and placed on the dining tables starting with the archangels and descending downward. The angels held out their empty chalices and the cherubs poured golden nectar into each of the cups, filling them to the very brim with eternal essence. As the food piled up onto the table, angels began to shove the food into their faces. They were completely engulfed in it, Sapphiel looked at the plate of food in front of him but could not bring himself to touch it. Looking around at others, he felt an air of uncomfortableness he could not quite pin.

Overfed

Succulent flesh cannot appease my stomach's sense
of urgency to spill this divine nectar and fly away.

Winged gods turned beasts, ripping flesh from bones, monstrous vultures.

Blood nectar dripping and acid pooling at their feet,

Shuffling mounds of food down their throats, their ravenous nature disgusts me.

This symphony disorients my mind, each stroke of the violin string,
plucking at my feathers, my wings ache for reprieve.
I look around to find a piece of me, but there is no one that seems to fit my soul's puzzle.
Comparisons shatter certainties I thought I had set with stone,
Broken into fragments,
Heavy set, my lungs collapse under the weight of my own insecurities.
Is it okay for me to pretend like I know how to capture the hearts of people?
This plate in front of me grows in size as does Lucifer's power,
But this sweet taste turns sour in my mouth,
Bitter, it burns me to my core.
Heavenly ambrosia rotting my tongue and spreading its decay through my body,
Smashing this food against my teeth, it will not accept this meal.
Please let me devour his words as others do, Aren't I lucky?
Aren't I lucky to be served such delicate cuisine yet my will won't allow me to eat?
Is it better for me to starve? For my body to dry up and wither,
Like an almond blossom in the summer heat,
Forever watchful but hollow in my trunk.
If only I could eat.

Empty plates lay strewn across the dining room and not a crumb left by the angels after the feast. However, Saphael's plate stayed as it did the moment he got it. Plentiful and untouched. The cherubs began to clean up the plates and take them back into the kitchen. With their furry tails, they dusted and cleaned up the floor which was covered in a debris of used cloths, trash, and any bits of food that were not consumed. He clenched his hands against his

stomach, trying to calm his body's aches. His wings drooped downward, just barely touching the floor and his feathers looked like wilted leaves on a dying oak. The bright colors that once filled this hall, looked dim and undersaturated to him now. A sickliness overcame him, and he wanted to leave as soon as possible.

"I hope you all enjoyed yourselves" Gabriel stood up from his chair with his signature smug smile on his face. Did it look wider than usual? Saphael placed his head against the table to allow the marble to cool his nausea.

"Please allow the cherubs to clean up the area and enjoy the rest of your day. Tomorrow we will be announcing the next class of angels to ascend to brand new heights!" This was Gabriel's first comment that garnered genuine praise from the angels as many hoped to improve their rankings. And with that brief message, the archangels disappeared in a flash of light leaving the rest of them and going back to their important duties. Saphael flew out of the hall faster than anyone could notice.

Chapter 6

Sapphiel could only describe Elijah as neurotic. He thought he was used to being around control freaks because of Luciel, but Elijah was a whole other level of complete obsessiveness. While Luciel was neurotic, he was always in control of his own high-strung behavior. However, Elijah's presented itself as spurts of unbridled energy and this was reflected in his car as well.

Sitting in the backseat of his rusted metal contraption, Sapphiel was glad he wasn't able to use any of his senses in that moment. Crumbs of unknown foods were encrusted in between the seat cushions. Stains of yellow, red, and green splotched against the polyester fabric, creating a greasy film over the seats. All types of trash like papers and food wrappers cluttered the car, completely covering the floor. In this sea of mess, he could only imagine Luciel dropping dead at the sight of this disgusting garbage.

Freshly frazzled from the confrontation Sapphiel had seen with his boss, Elijah was in no state to drive and his worry translated through his driving. Sapphiel knew there was no possible way for him to die on Earth, but he couldn't help to clench his fists and grit his teeth at every swerve and hard stop the human made. The man spewed a line of curses every time he narrowly avoided a major accident and Sapphiel gripped the seat as hard as he could. He could feel how hard the human was latching onto the steering wheel as the bottom of Sapphiel's hands turned a deep crimson red. Peering through the rearview mirror from the back, he saw tears starting to form at the corners of the man's eyes. There was no way he was actually crying... Elijah's face hysterically scrunched up as he struggled to stop the hot tears from flowing down his face. Sapphiel's mouth hung open in astonishment at the man's complete mental breakdown. He was truly the most unstable creature he'd ever seen.

As the sun completely descended below the horizon, the neon lights of Las Vegas awoke one at a time. Like a sparkle of fireflies, people appeared in the streets and the city, now completely illuminated, came alive in the night sky. Drowning out the monotonous drone of the engine, the jovial bursts of chattering laughter made his eyes widen. Unlike the systematic almost mechanical way angels flowed through the streets, humans seemed to sprawl out in all directions, weaving around each other attempting to get to their destinations. Everything was so messy down here it physically made his eyes hurt but for some reason he was too intrigued to look away. To the right of the road, most of the walking traffic headed towards the direction of a large extravagant building decorated in a vibrant display of yellow and green lights. A large sign decorated in the same fashion as the building, was hung at the front of the entrance. *Sodom Casino & Hotel*. Gambling was another sin which Sapphiel knew to be prevalent on Earth from his studies. Curiously enough, there were no angels following the humans inside what would be a sin hub. They would just fly past the building as if they couldn't be bothered to deal with what misdeeds were occurring in there.

As Elijah continued to drive, the lights of Las Vegas began to dissipate in the distance and the city scenery became more rustic and subdued. After what seemed like an hour, due to the combination of heavy traffic and horrendous driving, they stopped at a small gas station. The rundown station looked like it had seen better days and was practically falling apart at the seams. The pale-yellow walls had cracks all along the surface and the old paint was flaking off. Elijah got out of the car and headed towards the glass door which were completely covered in a thin veil of dust. Following him inside the building, there was an elderly woman behind the counter. Her face was worn and riddled with wrinkles. Her shoulders looked stiff as she hunched over the counter, peering over at Elijah. Sapphiel realized this was the first time he'd seen someone aged

in real life. It made him uncomfortable seeing the woman's crippled form, it felt like the life was slowly draining from her body. He tensed up as the woman's veiny brittle hands reach out for Elijah's face. He could feel the cold and stiff fingers caress his face, sending shivers down his body and making his feathers prick upwards.

“Abuela, ¿Por qué no estás en la cama? ¿Donde está Mami?” Elijah said concerned. There was a softness in his voice that shocked Saphiel. Only ever hearing the man's shrill screams of anguish, he didn't think that he was capable of anything else. His normal voice had a low tone, full of depth and a slight rumble that permeated Saphiel's chest.

“Ella está en la parte de atrás. No es seguro dejarla sola.” On cue, Elijah's mother came from a backdoor and rushed to hug him wrapping her arms around the shoulders of her son. She was just barely able to reach her fingertips on his broad back. Even though their heights were comically different, Elijah seemed to sink into her arms and Saphiel felt a new warmth come over him. All at once, the anxiety he'd felt through Elijah disappeared and was replaced with something he'd never felt before. She released her hold on him and slapped him playfully on the shoulder.

“Mijo, why didn't you tell me you were coming? I could've had time to make something.” It was clear Elijah got his appearance from his mother as he looked just like her. Her smile was bright and wide, very prominently showing her dimples. Her long dark brown hair curled very similarly to Elijah's and even though she was visibly aging, she exhibited a youthful aura.

“I wanted to surprise you.” Elijah's cheeks reddened and showed that wide, toothy grin he shared with his mother. Saphiel found himself smiling along with him. Elijah's happiness

was infectious and his brightness changed the mood of the dull room. His tan skin seemed to glow, even under the harsh muddy yellow lights. Abuela stumbled a bit as she was standing and the two grasped her quickly, slowing walking her back over to the chair at the front desk.

“How’s your work going?” Mami said hesitantly as she gently placed Abuela back in her chair. Elijah cringed slightly and shoved his hands into his beige coat pocket.

“You know how it is...these people just want a story. They don’t give a shit about anything that actually means something.” Mami glared at him and he instantly rose his hands up in defense, apologizing for his language. She seemed satisfied with his swift response and took a small broom hanging off the wall which ornamented with a variety of newspaper articles written by Elijah. She began to sweep the floor with precision, quickly getting into every nook and cranny. It was so interesting how she was able to move so fast through the store while still being able to have a full conversation with Elijah. She never seemed to stop moving.

“Well like I tell you every day mi amor, if they don’t want to listen you have to make them.” Elijah rolled his eyes out of his mother’s view.

“How can I make them listen if they don’t even want to read it, Mami? You don’t understand these people just make me do their dirty work. Editing papers and getting coffee isn’t what I went to college for!”

“Everyone has to start somewhere, and you knew the risks before you started!” Mami danced around the metal racks, quickly shuffling the dirt into her dustpan like an ice skater.

“I just don’t understand why you aren’t seeing it from my view, why do you always have to defend these people?” At that question, she finally stopped working and looked directly into Elijah’s eyes with an intense gaze that penetrated through his soul and made Sapphiel freeze up.

“Eli, you can’t spend your life being mad at others because you’re not going to get anywhere with that mindset. I’m defending them? I just don’t want you to lose faith in your dreams.” Elijah pursed his lips and held his head down, as his mother walked towards him and placed her hands on his shoulders.

“I know how you get mijo. You’re full of passion, just put that energy into your writing and one day you’ll create something so magnificent they won’t be able to ignore it.” Elijah sighed and nodded briefly, Sapphiel could tell he was trying not to cry. The tears peeked out of the corner of his large brown eyes. Elijah’s tearful glimmer almost looked beautiful for a second. With one cleansing sigh, Eli allowed his anger to pass through him.

“By the way, I have something for you.” Eli reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a white envelope, handing it to his mother. She looked at it skeptically and slowly opened the sleeve. Pulling out the slip of paper, she immediately tried to force the check back into his hands.

“No no no I can’t take any more of your money.”

Elijah shook his head and forced the papers back into her hand. Softly interlocking their fingers together and holding her hands with a reaffirming grip.

“Here.”

There was a pillowy softness in Eli’s eyes when he looked at his mother. It was rich and full of warmth like a decadent chocolate cake. Sapphiel felt a twinge of pain hit his heart, the uncomfortable feeling he’d begun to have ever since he’d gotten here continued to grow. In all his centuries in Heaven, he had never experienced this emotion he felt through Elijah. Unlike the saccharine sweetness of Heaven, Earth felt so real and genuine.

“Esta oscuro. Tenemos que irnos a casa.” Abuela arose from her chair and started towards the front door in a sudden haste. Mami put her arms around abuela and attempted to lead her back into the chair but Abuela brushed her hands off.

“Oye, estás siendo demasiado apresurada.”

Abuela shook her hands and snatched her large turquoise purse from on top of the counter. Saphiel was surprised that she was even able to lug something that big.

“Tenemos que irnos antes de que vengan los demonios!” Abuela did a gesture of protection from her shoulders to face. Mami looked slightly irritated while Elijah tilted his head in confusion.

“Demons?” Elijah raised his eyebrows inquisitively. Saphiel had the same reaction Elijah had. There was no way demons could be here. Mami clasped her head and shook her hands in front of Elijah’s face, nonverbally begging him not to bring this up.

“Some kids have been breaking into stores late at night. It’s nothing to concern yourself about.” Mami said.

“ ¡No! Los niños no lastimaron a Luis?” Abuela proclaimed.

“Luis at the bakery?” Elijah asked. Abuela nodded and continued the story with a newfound vigor because she found someone that would actually listen to her.

“His bakery was completely destroyed. All of his merchandise devoured. But the worst thing they took was his spirit. They found him in the morning sitting in the mess, speaking in demon tongues. A language no one could understand. He hasn’t been the same since and now his family doesn’t know what to do with him.”

“Mami, Luis always had problems. He once told me fairies ruined his cakes.” Mami said with a bit of exasperation in her voice.

“He wasn’t wrong about that, those troublemakers get into everything.” Abuela retorted. Mami rubbed her temples and her annoyance became more apparent on her face. Elijah took note and opened the front door, guiding them both out.

“You and abuela can leave. I can finish up for you.”

“No, you already do to much for me mijo”

“No its okay, Abuela should be in bed. Anyways, I have some work to do and I can use the computer in that back to finish up.” Mami stared at Eli for a little bit before sighing and rubbing her eyes. Her fatigue was finally catching up to her and she didn’t have the energy to try to argue with him about it.

“Okay but come back to the house as soon you’re done.”

With one last hug, Mami and abuela said their brief goodbyes to Eli and left him at the gas station.

Locking the door behind them, Eli went to the back and retrieved a mop. He continued to clean the store as Sapphiel watched him work. For some reason, Sapphiel didn’t feel as annoyed attending to him as he did earlier in the day. Eli swung the mop around the floor not at all as gracefully as his mother. His forcefulness caused him to throw his bodyweight too hard in one direction and the man toppled onto the ground. Sapphiel snickered to himself and flew closer to the clumsy human. He didn’t know exactly why but he started to enjoy watching him. He noticed things about him that he hadn’t when he’d first confronted the dysfunctional man. He noticed

how earnest he was in his expressions, even when he was alone, you could tell exactly what he was thinking just from the look on his face. He liked the veins that would pop out on his forehead when he was concentrating on even the simplest of tasks like dusting a counter. The very existence of this man created a slew of thoughts in his head. He wondered how someone stuck at a desk all day could possess such a sturdy physique. How was it that even in the harsh artificial light, his skin still glowed as the sun shined? Even his nose, which once seemed bulbous now reminded him of the ones on the Grecian statues, dedicated to their gods. His silklike hair flowed like a ribbon and all Sapphiel wanted to do was grasp the locks in between his fingers. And finally, Sapphiel noticed his eyes. His deep caramel eyes which put him at a loss for words every time he stared directly into them. Those cavernous yet enchanting eyes that sucked him in, completely trapping his curiosity. How could a pair of human eyes be so intense and utterly surreal? It was like the man was staring directly into him. Elijah dropped the mop and fell to the ground with it. Looking up directly at Sapphiel, stupefied, were those deep caramel eyes staring directly into his own.

Golden Boy

To my dear golden boy whom I love so,

Eyes of amber ore foresee through my soul.

You heighten my senses, dream Apollo.

My hummingbird heartbeat slows to a lull.

Wishing to see your warm smile again.

Stone sculpted and Herculean built,

Your hair shines as a lion's sunlit mane,
Free spirited, valorous, and untamed.
Caramel kisses and chocolate doves,
Those delicious divinations you hold.
Honey dripped lips lusting for all your love,
I need to unwrap your secrets untold.
Our fates destined to be untied and glee.
My dear golden boy, fly away with me.

Chapter 7(Excerpt)

The sun began to set, and hues of orange and violet filled the sky. Elijah slowly approached the house, which was small, but made sense for a family of three. The building's rounded edges made for a cute appearance and the clay tile roofing seemed to blend in with the apricot sky. Surrounding the house was a beautiful garden. The area was fruitful with various vegetation such as tomatoes and squashes. A floral display of cooler toned colors like blue, lilac, and cerulean, decorated the front porch. It all looked so surreal especially with the descending sunset as a backdrop. Elijah noticed Sapphiel's mesmerizing appreciation.

"My mom likes to keep up with gardening. It was something my grandmother used to do all the time but she's getting older so she can't keep up with it as well as she used to." His sentences faded as he reminisced on the past. Though it sounded like joyful remembrance, it carried a hint of sadness.

"It must be hard for your mother to keep up with all of this alone."

"She tries her best." Elijah opened the door and a distinct cinnamon aroma hit Sapphiel's nose. A soothing calmness came over him. Various objects decorated the house at random. From a ticking cat clock to a garden gnome just sitting at the kitchen counter, knickknacks of all kinds ornamented the cozy home. Candles were lit at almost every empty space, which was definitely a fire waiting to happen, but he trusted the mother's judgement. Elijah set down the medicine bottle on the table, resting it on pile of old newspapers.

"She's probably sleeping so I'm going to check on her real quick. Can you wait here?"

Sapphiel feigned playful annoyance which caused Elijah to roll his eyes, but Sapphiel could see a smirk as he turned corner of the hallway.

“And don’t touch anything!” Sapphiel watched as he opened the bedroom door and headed inside.

He waited for Elijah behind the wall, while he checked on his mother. Even though he told him not to touch anything, he couldn’t help but to run his finger along the framed pictures of his family on the wall. Sapphiel was able to watch him grow from a little boy to a man with every picture he passed. Church outings, school events, birthdays, holiday celebrations, and other milestone events in Elijah’s life were time encapsulated on his mother’s wall. He felt like he was intruding on something sacred, seeing deeper into Elijah’s soul than he had ever let him. “Mami!” Elijah’s guttural scream shook the house so hard, the birthday picture fell from its hook and shattered on the tile floor.

Sapphiel’s wings untucked, ripping the jacket off his back, and burst downwards, propelling him as fast as possible towards the room. A putrid sickness filled his mouth when he saw what was occurring. Elijah hovered over his mother with hands gripping both of her arms. Her body viciously convulsing on the bed and white froth dripping down the corners of her mouth. But Sapphiel wasn’t focused on her, he was stupefied by the *thing* connected to her.

Attached to his mother were dozens of small tendrils that pumped into her. Following the long tendrils, he made his way to the creature hovering above her. It looked like a bat if it could even be called that. Its strangely bulbous body was being held up with two large black wings tipped with curved blanché claws. The lack of feathers created a very porous texture on its gray skin. The most disconcerting feature of the beast was the mask. Unable to tell if it was a part of its body or not, the creature wore a stone mask with a human complexion carved into it. Its emotionless face glowered down at her body and its long thin claws at the end of his tendrils prodded at the mother like a lab rat. He had finally seen a demon in the flesh.

Sapphiel gripped his mouth and felt his body begin to shake at the grotesqueness. He couldn't help but to let out a small yelp, his heart giving in to fear. Unfortunately, this the sound alerted the demon to his presence. The spine-chilling face swiftly turned upwards, focusing its intense gaze onto Sapphiel. Before he could even think about his next move, the demon was hurtling towards him. The impact hit hard and left Sapphiel completely shocked. Within seconds, the demon wrapped its tendrils around his body. Pushing his arms against the demon's face, Sapphiel attempted to rip himself away from it, but the more he struggled, the more tendrils would grasp at him. The two thrashed around the room, knocking over everything they came into contact with. With a hard thrust downwards, the demon crashed them into the bedside table, completely destroying it in an explosion of wood shards.

"Sapphiel, what's wrong with you?!" Elijah screamed as he held onto his mother's body which now laid limp in his arms. Sapphiel's eyes widened a little when he realized Elijah wasn't able to see the demon.

Sapphiel's eyes darted across the room, hoping to find some sort of out. They rested on the window and knew what he had to do. As he and the demon continued to grapple beneath the ceiling, Sapphiel lined them up before propelling them both through the window. The sounds of Elijah's shouting and glass breaking were muffled by the speed at which they were flying upwards. The dark sky enveloped them in a foggy haze and Sapphiel could only see the demon in front of him. He brought his fist forward and began to punch its face. With each strike, he could see cracks beginning to form on the mask and the demon became angrier. It released the most ear-piercing noise, sounding like a combination between a bird's screech and a low demonic growl. Its tendrils began to wrap around Sapphiel's wings, ceasing their function and plummeting them both back towards the ground.

The crash hit Sapphiel's back first, pain surged across his spine and he choked back tears. He had never been in so much hurt before, but he didn't have any time to process it before the demon appeared from the smoke. What was left of its stone mask crumbled away, revealing a hideous nest of tentacles and snarling mouths. They gargled and snapped, slithering towards him in murderous rage. Sapphiel could only muster the strength to hold off the beast by its neck. Trying to find a hold on its oily skin proved to be difficult and he could only cower as the monster moved closer to his head.

A shining light filled the space, so bright that even Sapphiel couldn't bear to gaze at its brilliance. Once the light dissipated, he was able to open his eyes. The ground was completely scorched, and the gorgeous garden transformed into a desolate waste land. The demon, now a bubbling puddle of goop was splattered where it had once been. A large shadow loomed over him and the previous terror of being decapitated by a demon was replaced with an even larger sense of dread at what was behind him. Slowly, he turned his head and saw Archangel Michael scowling down on him. He was accompanied by a slew of other angels, but he couldn't make out any of their faces.

"Sapphiel!" Elijah burst from the front door and ran towards him, but it was too late.

Sapphiel felt his body rise off the ground and his last view of Earth was Elijah's shaken face, grasping hand, and broken spirit.

Chapter 8

If looks could kill, Sapphiel would be burning holes in the back of every one of their heads. As if Michael sensed his animosity, a sharp pain pulsed inside his chest and a feeling of absolute grief washed over him. Everything around him began to look bigger and terrifying. Suddenly, he felt like a small mouse surrounded by a pride of all-devouring lions. It all happened so fast. One moment he was on Earth and in a second he appeared back on Heaven's oversaturated floor. When he regained his senses, he was already being led by Michael's soldiers to an unknown location. Michael was nowhere to be seen. None of the angels would tell him where they were going, but from the grand inclined marble pathway he knew they were probably headed towards the throne room. Not many common angels have been summoned to the abode of the archangels, but when one was, it was either an immense honor or total damnation. Judging from the jeering glares of the Powers, he was not being honored.

The pathway curved and suddenly he was thrust into a wide garden. At first, he was shocked to find out there was any sort of greenery in Heaven, but as he observed closer he realized the white flowers were just stone intricately carved to look like lush foliage. The craftsmanship should've impressed him but he instead felt...disappointed. Without meaning to, Elijah's mother's garden came to mind. The messily arranged flowers and rusted tools ornamented the land, but you could still feel the small yard brim with life. Comparing this to the pale sullen colors of this manufactured garden, he preferred the actual thing. "I said keep moving!" Apparently, Sapphiel had been gazing at scenery for too long because this time the guard shoved him harder and made him fall flat on the ground. The Powers didn't even attempt to hide their laughter and chortled down at him. The familiar rage bubbled up inside of him and this time he wasn't going to let it go. Like arms, he used his wings to push up against the ground

and turned himself upright. The angel's eyes widened in shock but weren't fast enough as Sapphiel raised his fist, preparing to attack the guard.

"Sapphiel!" He brought his fist back to his body when he heard his friend's shrill voice. The small boy enveloped him in a strong hug from behind. "I haven't seen you in ages!". Luciel looked the same as he did when he left him, his hair perfectly in place and his joyful exuberance never seemed to fade. Luciel's presence made the soldiers stiffen up as he was a higher rank than them, but Sapphiel made sure to keep an eye on them as they walked towards the throne room.

Luciel released his grasp on him and then looked quizzically.

"Why are you heading towards the throne room?" Luciel questioned.

"I don't know why they're taking me there." Sapphiel spat out. A wave of horror washed over Luciel's face.

"What did you do?"

"I didn't do anything!"

Luciel peered into his eyes and then snapped his fingers like he came up with a grand moment of eureka.

"Oh! You're getting promoted!" Luciel exclaimed. Sapphiel couldn't help but audibly groan at his ridiculous assessment.

"Luciel, Why would they promote me after a week?"

Luciel shrugged and slapped his back in excitement.

"You must have done some job back on Earth! I'm so proud of you!" Before Luciel could go off on another one of his stupid motivation speeches, he told the truth.

“Michael brought me back.” Sapphiel said awaiting Luciel’s reaction. The boy stared at him like he uttered the worst curse words known to man.

“He brought you back here himself?!” Luciel was astonished. Sapphiel nodded his head and brought himself to tell the most shocking part.

“I...I saw a demon.” Sapphiel stuttered. As if Luciel’s mouth could not hang even lower, the boy’s face looked like a weight was hanging from beneath his chin.

“A demon? How? What? Where?!”

“It attacked Eli- I mean my human’s mother and then came after me once it saw I was there. I tried to fight it off, but it was too strong and almost got me. Michael came and destroyed it before bringing me back here.” Luciel shook his head in disbelief.

“It attacked you? Unprovoked?”

Sapphiel nodded.

“Sapphiel, there hasn’t been a demon spotted by a common angel since the Great War. Demons don’t openly attack angels. They’re dark beings who stay in the shadows and prey on human souls. The light that Heaven gives us keeps them away, so it shouldn’t have even been in the same vicinity as you. The only way they attack is if you’ve cornered them and the only angels capable of that are Powers. But for it to attack you without hesitation... that’s the reason the archangels want a conference with you. They just want to understand everything that happened.”

Sapphiel tried to process this information as quickly as Luciel was giving it.

“That makes sense.” He nodded slowly. Luciel flew up towards his face and grasped both of his shoulders with a reaffirming grip.

“You’ll be fine. What an honor! Not everyone gets to have a one on one with the archangels. Enjoy it!” Luciel released his grip and began to head back to his group of Dominions. Saphael grabbed the hem of his tunic before he could leave.

“Wait! What happened to the mother?”

“She’s gone.” Luciel said bluntly.

“Is she dead? Like on the otherside...”

“No, her body is alive, but she’s basically gone. Her spirit has been absorbed by the beast. She’s just a shell now.”

“There’s no way to get her back?”

Luciel shook his head. “Sorry...Its not your fault though! Demons prey on humans of the damned, so she wasn’t going anywhere great if that thing was after her!”.

“Oh” From what Saphael saw, he would’ve thought that she was a sure bet to enter the otherside. She was so warm and sweet. Could someone like that really have been unworthy? Luciel sensed his melancholy and playfully slapped his shoulder.

“After you’re done come to my place! Tell me all about your earthly adventures. I want to know everything you’ve seen okay?” He nodded and Luciel gave him a quick hug as if to say, “See you soon” and left with the other Dominions. A guard tapped his shoulder. “The archangels are ready to receive you”. The large doors began to slowly open and he walked into the throne room, more confident after his talk with Luciel. The light made everything hard to see, but once

the doors closed behind him, he could make out the incredibly vast room. What stood out the most were the seven thrones lifted at least fifty feet off the ground. Three on each side of the room with a larger throne located in the center. The room itself was strangely plain in comparison to the rest of Heaven. The room completely engulfed everything in a pure white light. It seemed less like a room and more like an area of blank space. A pang of discomfort hit his stomach. The eerie silence restirred the same feeling of terror he experienced earlier that day.

A shining pillar of yellow light burst through the center of the room and revealed a circle lined with a golden fence. He flew over to the ring and awaited the arrival of the archangels. Like clockwork, six beams of light shone over the thrones, and Sapphiel covered his eyes in order to not be blinded by their magnificence. When he opened them, he was confronted by the archangels. Six of them. He was in the presence of almost all of the archangels. “Sapphiel”. He turned to his left and focused his attention on Gabriel. “It seems like you’ve had quite the day.” His sickly sweet voice echoed across the room and his plastic smile didn’t make him feel any more comfortable. “How was Earth? It was absolutely miserable wasn’t it.” Gabriel laughed obnoxiously, his long silver hair bobbing with each chuckle.

“It was-“

“So your scroll says you were assigned to a...Elijah Johnson?” Raphael interrupted. Sapphiel turned his attention to the shortest of the archangels. It was hard to see any of his facial expressions behind that curly mound of auburn hair.

“Yes, your eminence.”

“Doesn’t look like you took many notes.” Sapphiel gulped. He was starting to feel happy he couldn’t see Raphael’s peering eyes behind that hair.

“Who cares about the human. Let’s discuss the more interesting thing.” A cheery voice said. Sapphiel turned to the younger looking archangel, Uriel. His golden eyes were bright and full of curiosity. His bleached blonde hair somewhat reminded him of Luciel, but his wide Cheshire smile made him feel like he was being looked at like a plaything.

“Can we hurry up and finish this ridiculous meeting so I can go back to studies?” Sapphiel turned to his right and saw the archangel Selaphiel, keeper of history and leader of the Principalities. He wasn’t paying any attention to Sapphiel at all, instead, staring annoyed at the ceiling and tapping his fingers impatiently against his throne. His long black haired was twisted messily into a bun, totally unbecoming of an archangel.

“You’re no fun Selaphiel.” Uriel pouted and sat crossed legged on his throne. Selaphiel rolled his eyes and pointed to the lanky archangel across from him.

“Look at Jegudiel. Why does he get to continue work but I don’t?” The wirey looking archangel, laid completely passed out on his throne. His soft snores escaping his gaped mouth.

“Now now you know he can’t help it” Gabriel said looking into a hand mirror, checking his complexion.

“Enough.” Michael’s authoritative voice boomed across the room and silenced all of the archangels immediately. Sapphiel was too scared to look but forced himself to stare at the leader of the archangels. His face didn’t seem angry, but cold. That icy gaze penetrated his very core, causing all the muscles in his body to tense up.

“Tell us about the demon.” The archangels all focused their attention onto him and he tried to will his body not to quake in their presence.

“Well...When I was monitoring my human I came across a demon. When it saw me, it attacked and I attempted to fight it.”

“How brave.” Selaphiel said sarcastically.

“After I failed at subduing the creature, that is when you came and helped me.”

“Saved you.” Michael affirmed.

“Yes, saved me...” Sapphiel tongue felt dry and he crossed his arms against his chest, hoping that would help quell his anxiety.

“Eh, I was hoping for something better.” Uriel said with a twinge of agitation.

“Do you know why this demon attacked you?” Raphael asked.

“No, your eminence.”

“What about the human?” Michael’s chilling voice reverberated off the walls.

“The human...” Sapphiel began to feel hot. How did they know? None of the archangels had the power to read minds, so how would they know?

“Is there anything in regards to the human that you would like to tell us?”

“Not to my knowledge, your eminence.”

Michael grasped his forehead and shook his head in dismay. “Hmm. Disappointing. Sapphiel, how did the human know your name?”

What felt like a jolt of electricity ran through his body. “my...my name”

“Are you going to repeat everything I say like an imbecile?” Michael said. Everything turned blurry. His hands trembled and he felt like his entire body was going numb.

“No my- I mean...I’m so sorry! I don’t know how it happened, but he was able to see me. I should’ve came back immediately! I should have reported it!”

“But you didn’t.”

“Please forgive me.” Sapphiel pleaded. His wings fell to his sides, cowering like a dog to his master.

Uriel whistled. “Revealing yourself to a human that’s a first class offense.”

“I’m so sorry” Sapphiel sank to the floor and began to sob into his hands. His tears were uncontrollable and red hot as they ran down his face. He felt like a different person, everything was crashing down before his eyes.

Suddenly, Michael sighed. “Because I’m feeling very generous, I will forgive this sin in God’s name.” Sapphiel brought his head up from his hands and cried tears of relief. God had blessed him on this day.

“I will be demoting you back to the commons. There’s no place in the Virtues for you” Raphael said jotting notes down into his scroll. Sapphiel nodded and felt even better now that he would be able to go back to his old job.

“I understand, thank you for your mercy.”

The archangels didn’t say anything else and the large doors opened. He took this as his cue to leave and bowed to every archangel before heading towards the doors.

“Do you know where demons come from?” Saphael stopped dead in his tracks and turned back around towards Michael. From the looks of the other archangels, they were also confused as to why he would be asking this.

“Demons are angels who have fallen out of God’s grace.” Saphael said softly.

“Yes, but how are they created?”

“I don’t know, your eminence.”

“Demons can only be only formed two different ways. As you said, if an angel falls deep enough into sin they can be turned, but a seemingly clean angel can also be turned by an angel who hasn’t fully become a demon.”

“I-I don’t understand”

“Where is Muriel?”

Saphael froze. He realized he hadn’t seen that angel or even attempted to find him during his time on Earth.

“Muriel was supposed to guide you onto Earth, but no one has seen him since your escapades on Earth.” Michael explained to the other archangels, who were now intently listening in. Uriel uncrossed his legs, Selaphiel seemed more alert, and even Jegudiel stirred in his sleep in response to Michael’s questioning.

“He left me! He was never with me, even before I set a foot onto Earth.” Saphael’s voice rose, but he couldn’t help it.

“You expect us to believe that an angel of his caliber disobeyed our orders.”

“Well I-“

“Saphael, do you know who that demon was?”

He shook his head, the terror reaching its peak . “It cant be...I promise I was never-“

“That demon was Muriel and the only other angel to last have contact with him is you. Every other angel has someone to account for them, except you.”

“I would never corrupt another angel. You have to believe me.”

“I don’t have to do anything. You have already shown the archangels that you lie in regard to that human. How are we supposed to believe anything you have to say?!” His voice bellowed and the throne room shook. Saphael grasped at his chest, and the tears began to form again.

“You have committed the ultimate sin, Saphael. You are a danger to us all and you must be disposed of.”

Raphael stood up. “Only God can banish an angel, there are rules to an allegation this serious. We must gather the Thrones and obtain more evidence and-“

“Let us ask him then.” Michael said. The large archangel rose from his throne and raised both of his arms high into the sky. His boisterous voice boomed throughout the room like a thundering stampede of wildebeest.

“God please give me the strength to send righteous fury down on this wicked soul.”

Everyone stared in awe, as a bright flash of lightning struck Michael. He crumpled a bit before standing up and his domineering figure cast a shadow of dread over Saphael. His eyes now shone a brilliant mixture of gold and white. His whole body giving off an energy of

unbridled power. The other archangels stared at him for a moment and they all instantly clasped their hands together in a prayer. Sapphiel couldn't make out the words they were saying, but it didn't matter.

“Wait! Please! I can do better!”

His pleas were drowned out by the sound of crackling thunder and the mutterings of prayer from the other archangels. Michael brought down his raised finger onto Sapphiel. Time slowed and all he could think about wasn't the pain he was about to endure, or how he even got to this point, but the heartbreak Luciel was going to feel. His will resigned to his sentence and he sunk down onto his knees, looking up at God's wrath about to rain down on him. He closed his eyes and felt the powerful surge of holy energy tear through him.

An Angel's Descent Into the Mortal World

I've been struck by God himself.

His lightning spears through my immortal body,
with the vengeance of divine judgment behind it.

My ribs fractured and wings detached,
I beg to rise upward, but the claws of my sins drag me down
Ripping at my subtle flesh, Carving me like common meat

I can't move.

I can't speak.

I can't feel.

My breath exhales but I don't receive any air back.

Hands clamp around my throat

as more air is vacuumed out of my burning lungs.

The grey sky encapsulates me and

Heaven becomes a distant star never to be touched again.

Poetry

Icarus Winged

You said I had flown too close to the sun.

That my feathers would burn away,

And my legacy would turn to dust forever,

before I reached my Elysium.

I did fly too close to the sun,

But my wings did not smolder.

They grew stronger, mightier

Propelled me higher than the heavens themselves.

My phoenix gust carried me

Through ethereal planes.

Into a world that brought forth

All I had wanted under lock and key.

Those senses I suppressed

Rebirth in a newfound ferocity.

Blazing my spirit trail and

Melting the celestial chains that once bound me.

Reclaiming my whirlwind heart and

Intwining lessons learned within

An angel ascends to heights unknown

Finally, I am free.

“Free to live

Free to laugh

Free to soar

Free to shine

Free to give

Free to love”

Yes, now I am free.

An Angel on the Dancefloor

How the mirror ball glitters in your eyes,

Rainbow lights, illuminate your visage.

That callow charmed beam gives me butterflies,

I'm completely ravished by this mirage.

Booming bass, but all I hear is your laugh.

The disco beats cannot distract my brain

From keeping this time as a photograph.

Here, No longer am I able to feign.

Taking your hand in mine, I'm enamored.

Sincere, confident, familiar yet rare.

Gliding on ice, your mist leaves me allured.

Your feather weighted steps bounce through the air

I want to share our prismatic romance,

Its stunning when an angel learns to dance.

Blind Faith

Clouds of grandeur swirled in my head,

Sweet angels sung harmonies,

Wistfully naïve, I believed every melody.

The frosted fallacies were forcefully fed,

The fantastical stories you tell interweave with my memories,

I am unable to tell which words are reality.

I read the tarot to make sense of things,

But like the Hermit, the truth never came to me,

You dealt me cards I couldn't possibly conceive.

My King of Wands left me in solus,

High Priestess now silenced and dim,

Death's hand in my fate decidedly grim.

Over the rainbow lied my hopes and dreams,

The palaces of emerald promised evaporated,
Along with the blind faith I so willingly entrusted to you.